

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7292

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COMNAVBASE SUBIC

CG 13TH AF, RP

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 10078

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF AUSTRALIAN AID TEAM IN MINDANAO

1. ACCORDING AUSTRALIAN EMBOFF, MOST MEMBERS OF AUSTRALIAN AID TEAM WORKING IN PAGADIAN (ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR) WERE TEMPORARILY WITHDRAWN FOR APPROX TWO WEEKS FOLLOWING TERRORIST THREAT IN MID-JUNE. FOURTY-SIX OUT OF FIFTY-FIVE CONTRACT EMPLOYEES AND DEPENDENTS ON PROJECT WERE EVACUATED TO CEBU AND REMAINDER WERE RESTRICTED TO CONFINES OF WELL-PROTECTED COMPOUND NEAR PAGADIAN. TERRORISTS HAD SENT LETTER DEMANDING PAYMENT OF P50,000 (US \$7,200) IN LIEU OF ASSASSINATION OF TEAM MEMBER(S). GROUP INVOLVED WAS PREDOMINANTLY MUSLIM BUT WITH SOME CHRISTIAN MEMBERS. AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY BELIEVES MOTIVATION WAS, AS USUAL IN SUCH CASES, A MIXTURE OF PECUNIARY AND POLITICAL BUT IS INCLINED TO SEE PREPETRATORS AS MUCH MORE SMALL-TIME BANDIT THAN GUERRILLA IN NATURE.

2. ALTHOUGH NO ARRESTS HAVE BEEN MADE, EVACUATED TEAM MEMBERS RETURNED TO PAGANDIAN AND CONCLUDED THAT SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WERE ADEQUATE. FOLLOWING THIS, AUSTRALIAN CORRESPONDENT WHO VISITED PAGADIAN FILED STORY ON EVACUATION WHICH HAS APPEARED IN AUSTRALIAN BUT NOT PHILIPPINE PRESS.

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3. ACCRODING EMBOFF, WITHDRAWAL HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH
RECENT SHOOTING AND GRENADING INCIDENTS IN PAGADIAN WHICH
HAVE RESULTED FROM OFF-DUTY BRAWLS BETWEEN ARMY AND
CONSTABULARY.
SULLIVAN

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